

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANILA 13214

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, RP

SUBJECT: MARCOS NETS ANOTHER COMMUNIST LEADER

REF: MANILA 13037

BEGIN SUMMARY: IN TELEVISED SPECTACULAR AUGUST 27, PRESIDENT MARCOS ANNOUNCED BEFORE HIGH-LEVEL MILITARY COUNCIL THAT THIRD-RANKING COMMUNIST LEADER AND FORMER ARMY OFFICER, VICTOR CORPUS, HAS BEEN IN CUSTODY SINCE JULY. ANNOUNCEMENT CAME AS COMPLETE SURPRISE TO PUBLIC (AND APPARENTLY TO MOST IN GOP AS WELL). REVELATION THAT CORPUS BAGGED FOLLOWS HARD ON HEELS OF PREVIOUS WEEK CAPTURE OF NUMBER TWO COMMUNIST AND LEADER OF NEW PEOPLE'S ARMY (NPA), BERNABE BUSCAYNO (COMMANDER DANTE). BOTH CORPUS AND DANTE APPEARED WITH MARCOS ON TELEVISION ALONG WITH 23 OTHER DETAINED ALLEGED COMMUNIST LEADERS. BOTH, ACCORDING TO PRESS, HAVE BEEN SUMMONED BY PROSECUTION TO APPEAR AT AQUINO TRIAL WHERE THEY ARE CO-DEFENDANTS. CIRCUMSTANCES OF CORPUS ARREST NOT ANNOUNCED. PRESIDENT SAID NPA LEADERSHIP HAS NOW BEEN DECIMATED BUT HIS SECURITY CHIEF GENERAL VER WARNED THAT NEW AND MORE MILITANT "THIRD ECHELON" LINKED WITH CHRISTIAN LEFT HAS TAKEN OVER. MARCOS WILL UNDOUBTEDLY ATTEMPT TO USE CORPUS AND DANTE TO MAXIMUM EFFECT AT

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AQUINO TRIAL AND WILL EXPLOIT THIS TRIUMPH IN PRE-

REFERENDUM PUBLICITY. WHAT ACTUAL EFFECT OF SURRENDERS WILL BE ON CPP/ML STRENGTH AND CAPABILITY REMAINS TO BE SEEN, BUT WE PROBABLY HAVE NOT SEEN THE LAST OF ARMED COMMUNIST INSURGENCY IN THE PHILIPPINES. END SUMMARY.

1. PRESIDENT MARCOS APPEARED ON TELEVISION AUGUST 27 AND ANNOUNCED TO MEETING OF MILITARY COUNCIL THAT COMMUNIST LEADER AND RENEGADE ARMY OFFICER, VICTOR CORPUS (AGE 31, ACCORDING PRESS), HAS BEEN IN GOVERNMENT CUSTODY SINCE SOME TIME IN JULY. THOSE PRESENTED TO THE COUNCIL INCLUDED CORPUS HIMSELF, THE RECENTLY CAPTURED BERNABE BUSCAYNO (COMMANDER DANTE), AND 23 OTHERS IDENTIFIED AS LEADERS OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF THE PHILIPPINES/MARXIST LENINIST (CPP/ML), INCLUDING FATHER EDICIO DE LA TORRE (ALLEGEDLY HEAD OF CPP LIAISON COMMITTEE), FORMER BEAUTY QUEEN NELIO SANCHO (HEAD OF FINANCE ALLIANCE GROUP FOR NORTH AND CENTRAL MINDANAO), AND NUCLEAR PHYSICIST ROGER POSADAS (HEAD OF CPP MILITARY RESEARCH DEPARTMENT). EXCEPT FOR DANTE AND CORPUS, COMMUNISTS ON DISPLAY HAD ALL BEEN IN CUSTODY FOR SOME TIME. ACCORDING PRESS, PROSECUTION HAS SUMMONED BOTH CORPUS AND DANTE TO APPEAR AS CO-DEFENDANTS AT AQUINO TRIAL.

2. MARCOS TOLD VIEWERS THAT RECENT ARRESTS HAD "DECIMATED" NPA LEADERSHIP (WHOSE ARMED COMBATANTS HE SAID NOW REDUCED FROM 1,800 TO HALF THAT NUMBER), BUT HE STRESSED THAT DANGER NOT ELIMINATED. INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY CHIEF GENERAL VER WARNED COUNCIL THAT ALTHOUGH FIRST AND SECOND ECHELON OF NPA HAS BEEN DECIMATED, A THIRD ECHELON WHICH HE DESCRIBED AS MORE MILITANT, MORE INTELLIGENT AND MORE AGGRESSIVE, AND "SUPPORTED BY THE CHRISTIAN LEFT," HAS TAKEN OVER THE PARTY LEADERSHIP.

3. CORPUS IS PHILIPPINE MILITARY ACADEMY GRADUATE WHO LED DECEMBER 1970 RAID ON PMA ARMORY IN BAGUIO, THEN DEFECTED TO NPA WITH CAPTURED WEAPONS ANNOUNCING THAT HE HAD JOINED THE "REAL ARMY." SINCE THEN HE HAS BEEN OPERATING MOSTLY IN MOUNTAINS OF ISABELLA AND NUEVA VISCAYA. HIS MYSTIQUE (BASED ON REPUTATION CONFIDENTIAL

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FOR HIGH MOTIVATION) WAS PERHAPS AS GREAT AS ANY OTHER FIGURE IN THE PARTY AND HE WOULD HAVE BEEN A LIKELY SUCCESSOR TO COMMANDER DANTE AS NPA CHIEF. IN HIS TELEVISION APPEARANCE, THE BOYISH-LOOKING CORPUS GRINNED CONSTANTLY, FOR REASONS ANYTHING BUT CLEAR. MARCOS DID NOT REVEAL CIRCUMSTANCES OF HIS ARREST OR CAPTURE WHICH CAME AS A TOTAL SURPRISE TO THE PUBLIC AND, WE BELIEVE, TO MANY IN AFP SECURITY SERVICES

AS WELL.

4. IN AUGUST 26 TELEVISED INTERVIEW WITH DANTE (BEFORE ANNOUNCEMENT THAT CORPUS ALSO BAGGED), PRESIDENT MARCOS (ACCORDING TO "DAILY EXPRESS") SAID HIS CAPTURE "JUST ABOUT ELIMINATES THE NPA ORGANIZATION IN THE COUNTRY," ADDING "THERE IS NOW COMPARATIVE PEACE IN BOTH LUZON AND MINDANAO." PRESS SUBSEQUENTLY CARRIED INTERVIEW WITH DANTE'S UNREPENTANT WIFE, MILAGROS LUMBANG, WHO HAD BEEN RELEASED FROM DETENTION LAST JUNE AND WHOSE SUBSEQUENT ACTIVITIES ALLEGEDLY LED AUTHORITIES TO HER HUSBAND. (SHE WAS MOTHER OF TWO-WEEK OLD CHILD AT TIME OF HIS ARREST.) "BULLETIN TODAY" CORRESPONDENT JUST HAPPENED TO BE ON THE SCENE AND FILED "EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT" OF DANTE BEING LED FROM VILLAGE HOUSE WHERE HE WAS ARRESTED. EVIDENCE SEIZED INCLUDING M-14 RIFLE IDENTIFIED AS COMING FROM "MV KARAGATAN" WHICH LANDED ARMS FROM PRC IN 1972.

5. COMMENT: ACTUAL CIRCUMSTANCES OF BOTH ARRESTS REMAIN UNCLEAR TO US. (SECDEF ENRILE TOLD AMBASSADOR "IN GREATEST CONFIDENCE" THAT CORPUS HAD ACTUALLY BEEN IN GOP HANDS SINCE JANUARY.) PUBLICITY ON DANTE CAPTURE SUGGESTS THAT GOP MAY HAVE REACHED ACCOMMODATION WITH HIM SOME TIME AGO. FACT THAT CORPUS CAPTURE WAS APPARENTLY NOT KNOWN TO MANY IN GOP SECURITY SERVICES INDICATES THAT HE MAY HAVE MADE A DIRECT APPROACH TO MARCOS, BYPASSING THE MILITARY. REGARDLESS OF CIRCUMSTANCES, CAPTURE OF SECOND AND THIRD RANKING PHILIPPINE COMMUNISTS IS A MAJOR TRIUMPH FOR MARCOS. HE WILL PROBABLY USE THEM EFFECTIVELY BOTH AT AQUINO TRIAL AND IN PRE-REFERENDUM THEATRICALS. AT PRESS CONFERENCE PRESIDENT AVOIDED ANSWERING WHETHER DECIMATION OF NPA WOULD ELIMINATE NEED FOR MARTIAL LAW. HE SAID
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THIS QUESTION WOULD BE REFERRED TO MILITARY COUNCIL FOR STUDY. GENERAL VER'S REMARKS ABOUT "CHRISTIAN LEFT" PLUS PUBLICITY OF DE LA TORRE ROLE INDICATES THAT GOP COULD USE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS AS RATIONALE FOR INCREASED INTIMIDATION OF CHURCH ACTIVISTS, WHILE CONTINUING TO AVOID DIRECT CONFRONTATION WITH THE CHURCH. (FATHER JALANDONI WAS ALSO AMONG THOSE NAMED AS NPA LEADERS IN CORPUS PRESS COVERAGE.)

6. IT IS TOO SOON TO EVALUATE IMPACT OF SURRENDERS ON CAPABILITIES OF THE NPA AND THE PARTY. HOWEVER, WE ARE REASONABLY CONFIDENT THAT WE HAVE NOT HEARD THE LAST OF COMMUNIST INSURGENCY IN THE PHILIPPINES.
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